DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 532 CG 024 542

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TITLE Adolescent HIV Education: The Impact of Dating Violence on Sexual Behavior.
SPONS AGENCY Centers for Disease Control (DHHS/PHS), Atlanta, GA.
PUB DATE Nov 91
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association (119th, Atlanta, GA, November 10-14, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome; *Adolescents; *Battered Women; *Blacks; *Prevention; Program Design; Sexuality; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS Condoms; *Dating Violence

ABSTRACT

Often Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) programs are based on the assumption that women have control over whether or not intercourse takes place; and, if it takes place whether or not condoms are used. However, those who are in violent relationships may have little or no control over the sexual activity in the relationship. Planned Parenthood of Maryland is in the third year of running a peer-support group program which is designed to prevent Human Immune Virus (HIV) acquisition in adolescents. After the first year's implementation it was clear that dating violence was an issue which needed attention. The second year program was expanded to include a session on dating violence. For the second year's evaluation a section on experiences with dating violence was added. Young black women (N=77), 79% of whom were sexually active completed a questionnaire which included questions on dating violence. Thirty-four percent of the women had experienced one or more episodes of dating violence in the past year and 15% percent had experienced severe dating violence. Group leaders gained the impression that the teenagers perceived the dating violence as normal. It is a matter of great concern that dating violence discouraged behaviors which are related to reducing the risk of contracting AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. These differences focused on condom usage, and perceptions of men's and peer's attitudes towards condoms. (ABL)

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ED402592

Adolescent HIV Education
The Impact of Dating Violence on Sexual Behavior

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This paper was presented at the 119th Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association in Atlanta, Georgia.

This study was funded by the Centers for Disease Control.

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Introduction

Oftentimes, AIDS prevention programs are based on an assumption that women have control over whether or not intercourse takes place; and, if it takes place, on whether or not condoms are used. For some groups of women, especially adolescents, this assumption is not true. Those who are in violent relationships may have little or no control over the sexual activity in the relationship.

The prevalence of dating violence among adolescents has not been well researched. The few studies which examined prevalence found that approximately ten percent of adolescents have been victimized at least once in their lives (Gamache 1991). In several studies, adolescents reported that conflicts about sex often led to violence (Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs 1985). A few studies also reported that adolescents often interpreted the dating violence as 'love' (Roscoe & Callahan 1985).

Planned Parenthood of Maryland is in the third year of running a peer-support group program which is designed to prevent HIV acquisition in adolescents. This program, called 'Teen STARS', was funded by the CDC. The program recruited young women from community health centers, family support centers, and local high schools.

After the first years' implementation, it was clear that dating violence was an issue which needed attention. Because a number of participants had reported ongoing violence in their sexual relationships, the second year program was expanded to

include a session on dating violence. More importantly, the Teen STARS program allowed time in each group to share dating experiences. It was designed to create a positive peer mechanism to support behavior changes, and to empower the teens to take control of their lives.

Because we did not know that dating violence was so common in this group of adolescent women, the formal evaluation of the first year of the program did not include questions about dating violence. For the second years' evaluation, however, a section on experiences with dating violence was added. Seventy-seven young women completed a questionnaire at the first group session they attended. These women were all black, their mean age was 15.2 years, and 79% of them were sexually active. The prevalence of dating violence, as well as its effect on sexual behavior and on condom use, was explored in this group and is what we are going to present today.

Results

As Table 1 shows, 34% of the adolescent women who entered the Teen STARS Program had experienced one or more episodes of dating violence in the past year, and 15% had experienced severe dating violence. Of special concern is that many of the young women experienced dating violence multiple times.

Table 2 displays the sexual histories of those who had experienced dating violence and those who had not. The two groups did not differ in age, and the lifetime sexual history was similar. The only statistically significant difference was that those who

experienced one or more acts of dating violence were over twice as likely to have been forced to have sex against their will.

Table 3 compares the sexual behavior of the two groups in the past month. The mean number of partners, mean age of the partners, mean length of relationship, and overall mean number of acts of intercourse did not differ. While not statistically significant, those who experienced dating violence reported a much higher percentage of 'high-risk' partners (this was mostly due to the partner's having sex with other women).

There was also a non-significant, but substantial difference in oral contraceptive use, with those who had experienced dating violence being less likely to use oral contraceptives. They were also significantly more likely to report that they would be happy if they had a baby in the next year.

Table 4 shows the differences between the two groups on condom use, and in beliefs and attitudes related to condom use. Only half as many of those who experienced dating violence reported using a condom in the past month, as compared to those who did not experience dating violence. There were no differences in either self-efficacy for condom use or their perceived risk for contracting AIDS/HIV virus.

There were differences in their perceptions of peers' and mens' attitudes towards condom use. On every attitude which was measured, those who experienced dating violence were consistently less likely to give responses supportive of condom use. On two of these attitudes, believing that men have a right to be angry at

women who request condom usage, and believing that men can't control themselves when sexually excited, the differences reached statistical significance.

Discussion

Of prime concern in this discussion is the fact that 34% of young women who chose to enter the Teen STARS HIV prevention program had experienced one or more acts of dating violence; this is three times the percentage that one would expect in a High school age population (Roscoe & Callahan 1985). It may be that this group of adolescents lives in a particularly violent environment, although research to date does not support the relationship of social class to dating violence (Lanier & Thompson, 1982). It may also be that teens who experienced dating violence would be more likely to join the group. However, group leaders gained the impression that the teens perceived the dating violence as normal.

While there were few differences in the sexual history or sexual behavior in the last month between the two groups, it is a matter of great concern that dating violence discouraged behaviors which are related to reducing the risk of contracting AIDS and other STDs. These differences focused on condom usage, and perceptions of mens' and peers' attitudes towards condoms.

One of the key characteristics of a violent dating relationship is the control that the abuser exercises over the other partner (Follingstad et al 1988). Our results seem to reflect this. The young women who experienced dating violence were

significantly less likely to have used condoms in the past month; they were also less likely to request condom use. Also, their partners were more likely to have other sex partners.

These young women also held perceptions of mens' attitudes toward condoms which were consistently more negative than those of non-abused women. They may not have been able to get their partner to use condoms; and may not have felt safe even requesting condom use.

Additionally, young women in violent relationships may not even have control over when they have sexual intercourse. In this group, those experiencing dating violence were over twice as likely to report having ever been forced to have sex against their will. These young women may not be able refuse sexual intercourse, let alone negotiate condom use with their partners.

The Teen Stars program addressed dating violence by providing opportunities for the young women to share dating experiences and by creating a peer norm which was supportive of positive and healthy decisions. Each session opened up with an eating and socializing period where participants could talk about what was on their minds. Concerns shared in the past had often dealt with dating situations, dating violence and date rape.

For example, during a group meeting, one member talked about a date rape experience that she blamed herself for because she had stayed home from school with the young man. Group members expressed their beliefs that she was not to blame, and that men do not have the right to force women to have sex. Group facilitators

talked about violence, rape and victim blaming. This participant eventually realized that she was not at fault for the rape.

In a different group, a member had been stabbed by her boyfriend. She said they were "just playing", but other group members responded that being stabbed is never playing. Facilitators addressed the violence by asking group members to come up with ways to stay safe. They also made appropriate referrals to other services for the young woman.

Facilitators learned about the use of "homey socks" during the socializing time. "Homey socks" are socks stuffed with batteries, soap or other hard objects which are used by the teens to keep their girlfriends or boyfriends in line. Leaders used this opportunity to talk about respect and non-violent conflict resolution. Often these discussions would last for the remainder of the session and the day's agenda would be put aside to fully address the issues.

The Teen STARS program also included a session focused specifically on dating violence. This session was scheduled midway through the program in order to permint enough trust to build in the groups to allow personal topics to be discussed in detail. It addressed teens' personal values and beliefs about dating, and about ways of establishing healthy relationships; it also introduced the concepts of rape and acquaintance rape. Participants examined the issues of dating, self-esteem, feelings, expectations and assertiveness as well as societal pressures, the influence of the media, gender roles, alcohol and drugs.

In conclusion, adolescent women are at serious risk of dating violence. Because programs geared at providing adolescents with skills useful in sexual relationships may attract a large number of women who have been or are in violent relationships, and because apart from the risk of injury from the violence, being victimized puts women at an increased risk for AIDs and other STDs; it is important that these programs address and deal with issues of dating violence.

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TABLE 1

EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY ADOLESCENT WOMEN IN A PEER SUPPORT GROUP FOR HIV PREVENTION
N=77

% EXPERIENCING ANY DATING VIOLENCE IN THE PAST YEAR[a]	34%
% EXPERIENCING SEVERE DATING VIOLENCE IN THE PAST YEAR[b]	15%

TYPES OF DATING VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED IN THE PAST YEAR[c]	% One Time	% Multiple Times
Pushed, shoved or grabbed	18%	9%
Slapped	13%	7%
Kicked, bit or hit with fist	5%	7%
Beat up	5%	5%
Threatened with knife or gun	0%	3%
Had knife or gun used on them	3%	1%

[a]This is the percent of subjects experiencing one or more of the acts of dating violence listed below.

[b]This is the percent of subjects experiencing one or more of the severe acts of dating violence, from 'beat up' to 'had knife or gun used on them'.

[c]This dating violence scale is based on the Conflict Tactics Scale, developed by Straus & Gelles (1988).

TABLE 2
A COMPARISON OF THE SEXUAL HISTORY OF THOSE WHO DID AND DID NOT EXPERIENCE DATING VIOLENCE IN THE PAST YEAR
N=77

	No Dating Violence	Dating Violence
Mean Age (sd)	15.1 (1.8)	15.4 (1.9)
% Never Had Intercourse	20%	15%
Mean Age At First Intercourse (sd)[a]	13.5 (1.7)	13.3 (2.1)
Mean Number of Sex Partners In the Past Year[a] (sd)	2.1 (2.0)	3.1 (2.7)
% Ever Pregnant[a]	22%	14%
% Ever Had an STD[a]	12%	24%
% Ever Forced to Have Sex[1] Against Their Will	16%	39%

[a]Only includes the 63 subjects who have had sexual intercourse

[1]Difference is significant at $p<=.05$

TABLE 3

A COMPARISON OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOR IN THE PAST MONTH AMONG THOSE WHO DID AND DID NOT EXPERIENCE DATING VIOLENCE IN THE PAST YEAR[a]

	No Dating Violence	Dating Violence
SEX PARTNERS		
Mean Number (SD)	1.4 (0.7)	1.7 (1.1)
% With 2+ Partners	30%	35%
Mean Age of Partners	17.5 (2.2)	18.1 (1.8)
Length of Relationship (In Weeks)	22.9 (30.3)	21.8 (25.4)
Mean Number of Acts of Intercourse (sd)	5.1 (5.1)	5.9 (6.1)
% With 4 or More Acts	46%	50%
% With High Risk Partners[b]	50%	71%
BIRTH CONTROL USE		
% Used a Condom[1c]	70%	30%
% Used Spermicide[c]	7%	6%
% Used Oral Contraceptives	33%	12%
% Who Would Be Happy If They Had A Baby in the Next Year[2]	11%	42%

[a]Percentages are for the 47 subjects who had sexual intercourse in the past month.

[b]Partner had sex with other women and/or other men (percent reflects subjects reporting yes or don't know to either one of these items).

[c]Used at least once in the past month.

[1]Difference is significant at $p<=.05$.

[2]Difference is significant at $p<=.01$ by the Mann-Whitney U-Test

TABLE 4
CONDOM USE: BEHAVIOR, ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS AMONG THOSE WHO DID AND DID NOT EXPERIENCE DATING VIOLENCE IN THE PAST YEAR
N=77

	No Dating Violence	Dating Violence
BEHAVIOR IN THE PAST MONTH[a]		
% Used Condoms[1]	70%	35%
% Requested Condom Use	70%	59%
SELF-EFFICACY FOR CONDOM USE[b]	55%	50%
% Who Know How to Help a Man Use a Condom	62%	54%
% Who Are Comfortable Asking a Man to Use a Condom	81%	89%
PERCEIVED RISK OF AIDS/HIV VIRUS		
% Perceiving No Risk	52%	56%
% Perceiving They Are At a Lower Risk Than Others	55%	60%
ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS		
% Who Say That Most of Their Friends Use Condoms	51%	42%
% Who Say That the Men They Know Do Not Like Condoms	23%	42%
% Who Say That Most Men Are Willing To Use Condoms	81%	65%
% Who Say That Men Have[2] Right to Be Angry at Women Who Request Condom Usage	2%	15%
% Who Say That Men Should Use Condoms If a Woman Asks, Even if They Don't Want to.	94%	81%
% Who Say That Men Can't Control Themselves When Sexually Excited[1]	19%	50%

[a]N=47 (the subjects who had intercourse in the past month.)
[b]Percent is percent answering 'true' to both items.
[1]Difference is significant at P<=.05 by the Chi-Square Test.
[2]Difference is significant at P<=.09 by the Chi-Square Test.